

Transcription: John Harley Ruth

Today is Thursday, January 9th, 2014. My name is James Crabtree and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. John Harley Ruth. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Ruth is at his home in San Antonio. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us.

John Harley Ruth: It's my pleasure.

Yes sir. Sir, the first question I always start off with in these interviews is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you entered the military.

John Harley Ruth: OK, I was born and raised in Cleveland County, Arkansas. I was born in Herbine, just south of Rison, and I spent a big part of my growing up with my grandparents across the Saline River on the other side of us.

Did you grow up on a farm?

John Harley Ruth: No, my dad was a doctor, and like I say I was born in Herbine, and he delivered me, and we were in Rison when my mother and he were together, but he had a problem with alcohol and she'd leave him, and then we'd spend the rest of the time with my grandparents. I loved my grandparents. Then I graduated from Rison High School there in Rison, and right after that, I took a job with 7 magazines, went into a little public with that. I don't guess I would bother with that. Anyway, so I just left them and I went and joined the Army. I tried to get the Air Corps, but they didn't take anybody at that time and so I just joined the Army. Boy some way or the other, I was going to fly ____ because when I was about 8 or 9, 10 years old, a barnstormer came to rise and my mother and I went up with him and from that day on, that's all I ever wanted to do was fly an airplane.

That's great.

John Harley Ruth: So after I joined the Army, I was in the 38th Field Artillery at Fort Sam Houston, and I went from there to school up in Lawton, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and then Hap Arnold put out a regulation, Army regulation, I don't remember, anyway, that said that if you had high school education, had been in the service over a year, and good physical condition and a lot of conditions, and I met all of those conditions, so I went to the commander, FAS, Field Artillery School detachment there, and at Fort Sill, and told them I wanted to put in for that. He turned to this guy anyway, and he said I want you to type up orders for Ruth to go back to his old organization. I'm not losing anybody to the Air Corps. So I reported back to Fort Sam Houston to the 38th FAS battery, and Captain Crosley, ____, I said PSE Ruth reporting, sir. And he said nice to have you back, Ruth. I said yes sir, nice to see you, but I want to put in for transfer to pilot training. He went through the roof and he wasn't going to have any part of that either. So Monday I come back again and I had been back to, I read that regulation and it said that he didn't have any say so. It had to go through our headquarters. So I went back and I showed this to the adjutant because Crosley wasn't there that day, and the adjutant could read, and we put it in. The first thing Crosley knew was that I got orders to report to SAC, San Antonio Air Cadet center which is now Lackland Air Force Base.

Sir, was this before or after the war had started?

John Harley Ruth: Oh, this was December the 7th of '41. Actually I got the orders to go there on December the 23rd of '41.

Yes sir, because you were already in the service when the war started.

John Harley Ruth: I had to have a year of service to qualify. So this was just right over, after a year. I went in on September the 3rd of 1940 and this was in September sometime of '41. It all fit me perfectly. I went to Lackland and for pre-flight, and then I went to Quero, Texas for primary. I flew PT-19's there. Went from Cuervo I went to Brady, Curtis Field, for basic, by PT-13's, and then from there back to Kinney, with AT-6's for advanced, and graduated from flying school the 5th of August of 1942. And they sent me then to the air transport command at Grand Prairie, and from Grand Prairie, the whole group, I was in the 5th period group at Grand Prairie, and we moved over to Love Field, and I started preparing airplanes. They would give me orders to go pick up an airplane at Tulsa or Oklahoma City, Wichita Kansas, wherever, and I would deliver them. Interestingly, while I delivered a lot of airplanes, but I flew quite a few A-24 Douglas _____. I loved that airplane. And they gave me an order to go to Tulsa to pick up an A-20, and I said well what's an A-20? They said you'll find out when you get there. Do you know what an A-20 was?

I don't think I do.

John Harley Ruth: It was called a Boston Hilit. The A-20 was I think the first, about the fastest twin engine airplane we had in the service at that time. It had about two 1,750 horsepower engines on it, and one pilot and just single pilot. So anyway I reported, I went to Tulsa, the factory at Douglas, and signed for the airplane and went out to the airplane, and I see this big, old airplane, a twin engine. So crew chief, he checked me out, I mean he gave me a real good walk around let's say. Then I get in the cockpit and he gave me a real good cockpit check, and every switch and everything, and what everything did, quite thoroughly. Then he showed me how to start the engines, and I got the engines started, and I said OK chief, thank you very much. He got down off the wing and I taxied out and took off. My first landing was at El Paso, Texas. From El Paso I went to Phoenix, from Phoenix to Bakersfield, and from Bakersfield to – what's the big city right across from San Francisco -

Oakland?

John Harley Ruth: Oakland, I delivered it to Oakland, and I figured I would check out in an A-20 then. Anyway, after delivering a lot of airplanes, just going and getting in them and flying them, I was sent to the 3rd OTU at Reno, Nevada for C-47 and C-46 transition. My first C-46 flight, I was supposed to fly a C-47 that night, but here we get down there at night, no C-47's. My instructor, he knew what my background was, the way I'd flown the airplanes, and he said well how do you feel about flying the C-46 your first flight at night? I said let's go. So away we go to the airplane and we did our walk around, got in, and I set down in my seat, and he set down in his seat, and he crossed his arms and he said OK, let's go. So I started the checklist and I learned the checklist up to a point and he'd say OK, let's go. I continued and get down to start engines, and he said OK, let's go, so I started the engine, and he said OK, let's go. So I taxied down at the runup position. That's all he ever said, not stop me, that let's go thing. All he ever did for a three and a half hour flight where we took off from, anyway it was in Reno, Nevada, and we took off from there and it was pitch black, not a light on the horizon or anything, and I

was on instruments from the time I roped around, and I had to even lock the tailwheel, bring the gear up, everything. He was still just sitting there with his arms crossed. Whenever we go across Donner Pass and picking up ice and everything else, and go to San Francisco, and I made an instrument approach and we got down and stop landings, full stop landings, the flight was about three hours and a half and I just, all I did was full stop landings from that time. When we got through and parked the thing, he said well I think you about checked out that C-46. Anyway, so after completing the 3rd OTU there at Reno, I went back to Love Field and from there I was sent to Memphis, Tennessee to the 4th Pier group.

Let me ask you real quick sir, if we can back up a bit. Now you were on active duty before the war started, where were you when Pearl Harbor was bombed? Do you remember that day very well?

John Harley Ruth: I remember that day real well. When I was at Fort Sill, I had this friend, and after I had gone back to Fort Sam Houston at the 38th Field Artillery, I did what we called a road march, the whole battalion by truck to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and we were there, and this buddy of mine was out in his car. We had just left Loughton and heading toward Altos. We were heading west on Altos when we heard it on the radio, and they said everybody get back. We turned around and went back, that was it.

When you went into the Army, it was before the war started, did you ever think that you'd be seeing combat, because I know things had been heating up around the world and the U.S. just had not gotten involved yet -

John Harley Ruth: I signed up and never gave it a thought.

Never did. But once the war started then, you had to have known at that point, right, that you would be going somewhere?

John Harley Ruth: I could have suspected that, yes sir.

Do you think because the war started that gave you the chance finally to pursue aviation like you had wanted all along?

John Harley Ruth: Well, I had already by this time, you know, I had gone back to Fort Sam Houston, I had already at this time put in my application for pilot training, and then one day I worked in supply and this guy walked in and he said who's Ruth? And I said well, I'm Ruth. He said well how long is it going to take you to clear the post? I said well why would I be clearing the post? He said I'm going to take you over to SAC. And I said and what is SAC? San Antonio Air Cadet Center. I said now why am I gonna be transferred over there? He said you're going to pilot training. And how am I gonna get over there, I said? He said I'm going to take you over there in a staff car. I never thought I'd ever see a staff car. So anyway, I said well you have that staff, it was 11:30 right then, I said you have that staff car out front and at 1 o'clock and I'll be there. I gave him 20 minutes change. I was there at 12:40 sitting there. And so that's the way I got started in my pilot training.

That's great. Was it something that came pretty naturally to you? I know some folks I've talked to said that pilot training can be difficult or there are different phases of the training that were difficult for them. Did you find any of it difficult or was it pretty easy for you?

John Harley Ruth: It was difficult enough that 75 percent of the class washed out.

That's a lot.

John Harley Ruth: Yeah, only the 25 percent of us got through, but my dad told me whenever I went into the Army to start with, he said well if they say jump, you just say which way and how high. That's the way I did all the way through pilot training. I was the only person I know of in that class that never got one demerit of any kind, so they weren't going to find anything to complain about with this boy.

What was it you think that caused most of the 75 percent to wash out?

John Harley Ruth: I guess inaptitude. It wasn't that they didn't want to do it.

I was just curious if there was a particular feature of flight training that was harder than others, if it was navigation, or if there was just something that a lot of them had trouble with that they couldn't get past.

John Harley Ruth: I really don't know what their problems were because I wasn't concerned with anybody else. I was only concerned with this old boy's problems, and when I got to, oh, I didn't tell you this, when I was at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, I was making \$56 a month and about \$45 of that every month I was spending on flight training.

OK, so you really wanted to be a pilot then because you were paying for it yourself.

John Harley Ruth: I had 35 hours, just about enough for private, basic, to primary, and my instructor, after the first flight, he said how much flying time have you got, Ruth? I said well what do you mean? I said we got an hour and 45 minutes didn't we? He said no, says how much have you flown before? I denied ever seeing an airplane. So anyway, went ahead and he asked me one more time because he checked me out about three hours, he soloed me about three hours, and after I graduated from flying school and I was in the 5th Pier group at Love Field, one day I bumped into him. He has left that job he had as an instructor down there and is now a civilian pilot in air transport command, and he said OK Ruth, dammit, I want to know how much flying time did you have before you went through primary? About 35 hours. I knew you had to have.

Yeah, he probably knew all along I would think that you'd had some sort of training to have been that good that quick.

John Harley Ruth: Yeah, so anyway after they transferred me to Memphis to the 4th Pier group, I got orders to go to Louisville to pick up a C-46, but the copilot, Edward J. Kelly, and Kelly and I went and picked up that C-46 at Louisville and brought it back to Memphis and then we got orders to deliver it to India, so we delivered it to India via Miami, Puerto Rico, British Columbia, and that's what it's called, anyway, British Guinea. Anyway to Tao, Brazil, from Tao over to the Sinchen Island, to Acraw and Donna, and Gold Coast at that time, and we had a problem after takeoff from Miami with both engines backfiring and went all the way back to Miami and got that checked, and the engineering officer said sorry, we can't find anything wrong with it. I guess we'll have to do a test flight. So he wanted me to come fly it. I said I'm done with my test flight. So he got somebody to go with him and away they got, and when they came in, parked, I climbed in the cockpit after they landed, I was standing there, was behind them, and

he looked at me and said Ruth, said I don't know what your problem was. We didn't have any problem with it. I said well fine, captain, you take this airplane and deliver it and I'll stay here and be an engineering officer. And he laughed and he said no, it did the same thing with them. So they changed the spark plugs. The reason I'm telling you all of that is that we got to Belin, Brazil and took off from there, and we had the same problem. They changed the spark plugs. Then when we went to Tao, Brazil, to Sinchen Island and then over to Acraw and had the same problem again, only this time when they changed the spark plugs instead of rebuilt spark plugs, they spent money and put in new spark plugs, but we had to wait about 10 days I guess it was or so at base for two weeks before they could get those plugs in. We had a wonderful vacation of surfing. We would go out and get on a surfboard and come back in, catch a wave, ride back in, and we would do that from daylight until dark for that whole time. Quite a vacation. Anyway, went from there across Africa and so forth to Kurachi, India, and wound up at Calconda.

That had to have been a long trip even without the delay en route. It would have been a long trip just from the beginning, correct, all the places you had to go through?

John Harley Ruth: Yes it would have been. Each one of those legs was a day, you know, and spent the night. So one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen – fourteen to fifteen days it would have been, yeah.

We were talking about the long ferry trip that you took over to India – what were your thoughts of all the different places that you saw along the way? That had to have been quite an experience seeing all those different nations en route.

John Harley Ruth: I don't know. You know, I had been delivering these airplanes all over, so I guess they were just another place.

And so once you get to India and you deliver your plane – go ahead.

John Harley Ruth: OK, I got to India and delivered the plane to the 20th Bomber Command that had the B-29's. The B-29, you know, went right from the drawing board to combat. It never was tested one iota after coming off the flight line. And they took those airplanes to India and started flying them, and they had a lot of problems with the R3350 engines, and it was mostly a cowlings problem I think, but anyway, you've heard the term probably, two turning, two burning?

I have.

John Harley Ruth: Well that's what they were doing. Every flight coming in it was two turning, two burning.

Yeah, that's not good.

John Harley Ruth: And I've seen several of them go off, down off the end of the runway. But anyway we were supporting them. They had about, I don't know, I think about eight air fields circling the main base, and our job was to fly around all of those daily, constantly. Then they sent us, Kelly and I, to Changtu in China, and we built another bunch of bases like that. Between ours to take off from to go to bomb Japan. And then one day we got orders to go to Quisin in China, about a thousand miles east of Cortning, and we landed at Quilin, and I went down the steps there and this lieutenant colonel who turned out to be Flip Cochran, you've heard of him.

I think I've heard the name but I don't remember, sir. Tell us if you would.

John Harley Ruth: Flip Cochran was the character in Terry and the Pirates, the comic strip. There he is in the flesh. He actually said Ruth, I mean lieutenant, he said, he didn't know my name, he said lieutenant, what are you doing here? I said I came to pick up oxygen bottles for B-29's. And he said well we don't have any oxygen bottles on this base. I says are you sure, colonel? And he said, I should be, I'm the base commander. And so anyway, he said, what are your plans from here? I said I'll go back to Cortning and from Cortning back up to Quilin, to Changtu. And he said well can you take a load of cargo back for us? And I said sure. He said how much can you carry? I said about 9600 pounds. He said OK, let's go get you a bite to eat and we'll come back and probably have it loaded by then. And so we did, we came back and I looked and that airplane looked like it was totally empty. I climbed up and looked inside and sure enough, he said oh, it's on there, I climbed up and looked inside and there were ingots on the floor. It turned out it was ten ingots of ten. So I climbed back down. He said lieutenant, at Kun Ming, I want you to report to General Chenault. I said well why would he want to talk to me? He said, well he just wanted to talk to you. I thought to myself, now how in the world does he know that Chenault wanted to talk to me? But anyway I went there and I reported to General Chenault, and he said Ruth, I'd like to use this airplane for a trip, and I said well, general, I'm sorry, but I have explicit orders. No one is to use this aircraft without the explicit permission of the commander of the 20th Bomb Air Command. He said well who is that? And I said that's General H.H. Arnold. So he said OK, I'll send him a message, and he got a message back approving it provided that I flew the airplane. No one else was to fly the airplane. So I get out to the airplane that's loaded, I mean it's got bales and bales on there and I didn't even think I could get to the cockpit, just the opposite of what it was in Quilin. So I asked this major that they sent along and I needed a major navigator real bad. So anyway they sent this major along and I said major, what's in those bales? He said sorry, I can't tell you that. That's classified. I said hmm. So we took off and get to 10,000 feet, and I started getting out of the seat and I climbed out of the seat and this major said lieutenant, where are you going? I said I'm going back to find out what's in those bales. He says you can do that, lieutenant. That's classified. I said major, who is the aircraft commander here today? He said OK, OK, says there's \$800,000 of Chinese money, that's \$800 million in Chinese money, that would have been \$8 million American. Anyway, I said well thank you major, but I don't need your money, I don't want your money, I just want to know what I'm carrying. So we went ahead, delivered it, and when I got over there, I took another load of ten back to Kun Ming, and that was the last flight for the 20th Bomber Command in China, so we went back to India and at India, my TDY, I was on TDY to the 20th Bomber Command, that ended my TDY to the 20th Bomber Command and I went back up to Merut up in the Assam Valley, and went to, when we got there, we were no longer approved after that. I was flying with a different copilot every trip and he was flying with a different crew each trip, so that was the end of flying with Kelly. So we were ordered in a mash-up together, but I finished my tour over there before he did and came back to the States, and now I just received, well, I guess I'm getting ahead of stuff, and I'm going to go ahead. On the 15th of August of this year, there was a half-page article on the opinion page of the *San Antonio Express* news about me with my picture up there in the corner and everything, and the reason I tell you that is that the author of that is Josh Bodeski, and Josh received an email from a lady in Connecticut which he forwarded to me, and this email said that she had a bracelet that had the name J. Harley Ruth on one side and the number 0522972 on the other side, and that 0522972 just happened to be my officer serial number. So anyway I contacted her and she sent me the bracelet along with the obituary of Edward J. Kelly, with up in the right hand corner it had the – oh gosh, let me see if I can find that – there it is. OK, I've got the thing in front of me, and up in

the right hand corner up there, and you might want to write this down, <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/EJKelly.htm>. Did you get that? OK, and so if you put that in, it will bring up this terrific obituary of Edward J. Kelly in the Arlington cemetery. He had his career, just absolutely super.

And who, sir, was the lady that sent that to you?

John Harley Ruth: And so this lady, her name was, oh gosh – me and names -

Was she related to him?

John Harley Ruth: Well that's what I asked her, I said there's only one way you could've come into contact, you must know a guy named E.J. Kelly, and she said that's my uncle. And her uncle was reported killed in action or missing or something. The first time they sent, and that happened twice by the way, but the first time they sent everything that was his back to her mother who was Edward Kelly's sister, and in that was that bracelet. She said she wore that bracelet and her second and third ring. Anyway, I just wanted to tell you this because it's got quite a saga, and now I guess I should get back to the story. After I left India and came back to the States, I was sent back to, I had three choices, so I put down Love Field, Dallas, Texas, and Love Field, Dallas, Texas, and Love Field, Dallas, Texas, and that's where I went. And I went back to ferrying airplanes. The first thing I did when I got there, they said well you ought to be pretty good with that C-46 by now. I want you to take this C-46 to Biack, New Guinea. So away I went to deliver that C-46 to Biack, New Guinea. When I started out in the thing, the hydraulic system, every time the actuated hydraulic system, it gets a little bit of popping, and I had never heard that before, but anyway we went ahead and it kept getting worse and worse, and by the time I got to, not New Guinea, anyway, I stopped on the northern part of the big island and I forget the name of that place, I'm looking at a map here. Well anyway, oh, well, wherever, anyway, I made two more stops, or one more stop after that place in New Guinea and then went and delivered it to Biack. Then I came back from that and then I went to the B-32 transition at Fort Worth, and was flying copilot with a guy and away we went to deliver that B-32 to Clark Field.

In the Philippines?

John Harley Ruth: In the Philippines, yeah. And we landed on Guam, and I'm gonna back up here. I didn't tell you what was the problem with that C-46 hydraulic system. I want to stick that in here. There was like a pin prick hole in the bladder of the cumulator, and it finally, it had leaked enough through that hole that it was all hydraulic fluid. There wasn't any air left, and it was banging, banging, banging, so we changed the cumulator. Now I'll get back to where I was with the B-32. Well the B-32, we landed on Guam and spent the night. We went to the Harmon Field Theater to the movie, and while there, they announced the dropping of the first atomic bomb. We went from Guam then to Clark Field and delivered that B-32, got on, patched on the way back to the States, landed on Guam on the way back, spent the night again, and we went to the Harmon Field Theater again, and they announced the dropping of the second atomic bomb, and I decided I wouldn't go back to that theater. I've been in that theater twice in my life.

But at that point you had to have felt pretty elated thinking that the war is pretty close to being over then, correct?

John Harley Ruth: Oh yeah, in fact we got back to, I didn't tell you this, but on the way delivering a B-25 that I was delivering to Kurachi, India, and I got to Metall, Brazil, and the end of the war with Germany. It froze everybody there and I had another two-week vacation of surfing. So now that was after the one in Europe. Now when we got to Hawaii, they froze everybody again, and so I had another week or so where I couldn't do anything, so I just had to go to the beach there and spend a little time. And then finally they released us to go back to the States or come back, and we landed at Harmon Field north of San Francisco, is it Harmon? Anyway there's an air field just north, an Air Force base north of San Francisco, and we landed there and I went, I was tired. I went right to bed and went to sleep and I slept through the big celebration in San Francisco.

And when the war ended, you ended up staying in, right? You eventually were in the Air Force, right?

John Harley Ruth: No, I got out. That could be determined to be a mistake because I wound up retired as a major. I might've, probably would have reached a higher rank, not much.

So you got out for a while but then at some point, did you go into the Reserves or back on active duty?

John Harley Ruth: That's what I was fixin' to say. I got out and I had 71 days or 91 days of terminal leave, and when that was over, I had been working at a menial job and I didn't like it. I got out and I didn't like what I ran into, so I went down on the 9th of January of '46 and I went back down and told them hey, can I get my commission back? They said no way, but tell you what we'll do, we'll make you a permanent master sergeant. I said I'll just take it. So I did and I said I ain't getting out of the military again. And so I took it and wound up to go sign up to go to Panama, and I was at Albrook Field in Panama then until sometime in spring I guess it was of '49. I came back to the States, and from there, I got back to the States and I wound up at Campbell Air Force Base in Kentucky. I worked under base ops there. I was in base ops all the time I was in Panama, and so I worked at base ops again here at Campbell Air Force Base. I kept putting in my recall request when I was in Panama. My commander there was Colonel Hank Hayman, and I kept putting in those recall requests to get recalled to active duty as a first lieutenant. We could never get one in through channels before the six months was over and it was always void by the time they got to Washington through the channels, you know, from Panama. So I get back to the States and I started putting them in there, and by this time they had eliminated that six-month because they needed people. They had eliminated that six months thing and I put one in, and one day Hank came and this B-25 landed and in walks Colonel Hank Hayman, my old Panama commander, and he said Ruth, what the hell are you doing still wearing those stripes? I said well, colonel, I keep putting in my requests and they never are valid by the time they get to Washington, but I've got one in now and they eliminated that restriction. And he said well I'm on my way to Washington right now. He said I'll just check on it when I get there. And it wasn't about three days later I got a letter from him, from Washington, he said Ruth, don't start spending your money now, but you're being recalled. And so I was recalled into SAC at Hunter Air Force Base, and I started flying there, and you had to have one year of active service on recall before you could go to the USAF instrument instructor school, and right after I got that, I went to Moody, went through the USAF instrument instructor school and I came back from that and they made me officer in charge of instrument buying what they called it. And so I went to, I have to back up here again, when I was at Campbell Air Force Base, one night about midnight, Saturday night, in walks this two first lieutenants, and they obviously had been doing a little celebrating, and this lieutenant started to fill out, and I said lieutenant, I'm

sorry, I can't sign your clearance. I was signing clearances because I was a rated pilot. Anyway, I said I can't sign your clearance. And he said oh, that's all right. Said I can sign it for myself. He says I got a green card. I just went into the other room and called the flight crew, the ground crew, and I said get out to that C-47 out there and disconnect the battery and get it out of there if you can. And I said don't ask why, just do it, and do it now. They said OK. So away they went. And this guy was Glenn R. Sullivan, became a dear, dear friend, but anyway, Sully and the copilot go out there and they can't get the thing started, and said what's wrong. So that was the end of their big celebration down in Nashville where they were gonna go. They were gonna go down there and do some more partying. So they didn't make that flight, and the first instrument school flight training, I get up on the stage and look down in the front row and there's that guy who at this time is a captain or a major, I don't know. But anyway, so I look and there he is. But we got acquainted and all. And then one day shortly after that, a B-47 come taxiing in and parked right in front of base operations and I was upstairs in my office and looking out there and looked down there and I saw that airplane, and this captain friend of mine standing there and I looked and said man, that is the most beautiful airplane I ever saw in my life. I said I've got to fly that airplane. Well, that was all there was to it except that two weeks later, I got orders to go to navigator school at James Connelly in Waco, Texas, and so I went through navigator school and got my navigator wings, and that was a requirement to fly B-47's. At that time, you had to be a pilot, a navigator, radar operator, so forth. Anyway I finished that and I went to Altos Air Force Base and reported in to a 339th Bomb Squadron, in the 96 bomb wing, and the officer I reported to was the operations officer for the squadron, and that was that Major Glenn Ray Sullivan. Well, Sully and I then were in the 96 bomb wing there at Altos in 339th Bomb Squadron. Then the whole wing moved to Dias Air Force Base in Abilene, Texas, and we were in the 339th still, but then they made another squadron, the 413th Squadron. So he was transferred over there and I was transferred over there, too. And then they did away with the 413th and we was both sent back to the 339th.

So you retired in 1963?

John Harley Ruth: And I retired from the 96th Bomb Wing after flying the B-47 for about 9 years.

What was it that brought you to San Antonio? Was it because it was a big Air Force town?

John Harley Ruth: Well, after I retired in '63, I still flew airplanes, nothing but flying airplanes. I delivered a bunch of airplanes solo, just me and the airplane all over the world to Australia, Singapore, South Africa and South America, Europe, all over, and I delivered all those airplanes. And I don't know why the heck I'm telling you that, but that's what I did. Oh, about killing that 30 years that I flew airplanes after that, my last 5 years I was flying for the Tom Harry. Tom Harry built the La Posada Hotel here in San Antonio, the one at Laredo, Texas, one at McAllen, Texas, and I was his personal pilot. Then we moved from Laredo up here to San Antonio. I told him one day, said well I'm gonna move to San Antonio. If you need me, give me a call and I'll come down and we'll fly. He said well that's good because we're all going to San Antonio. So we did and I flew for him until I quit flying. That was about December the 12th of '92 was my last flight. And so that's how I wound up in San Antonio, but I had already decided this is where I was gonna wind up. I told him I was leaving Laredo. So that's how I wound up in San Antonio.

Yes sir. Well sir, I really appreciate you taking the time today to share with us your story and about your military service and all the places that you went. It means a lot for our program

because as your one friend had told you I'm sure, we're trying to save these stories for posterity and we have archives here at the Land Office that go back to the 1700s, and we have the original Land Grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at The Alamo, and we have the Registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of all the settlers that first came to Texas, so our hope is that hopefully hundreds of years from now people will listen to these interviews and perhaps learn something from them.

John Harley Ruth: I want to tell you one more thing.

Yes sir.

John Harley Ruth: The reason my book if I ever do get it printed would be I Was God's Copilot, and what made me come up with that is I'm flying on a C-46 on a trip heading toward Kun Ming, China, in the clouds, with St. Elmo's fire, and I'm looking up at the windshield at the St. Elmo's fires that has the goblets of water hitting and exploding you know, and I'm fascinated with that, and I read the number on that C-46 that came the other right square over me about 10 feet maybe, and I read number 263 on the nose of that C-46, and right about that same place one time, I'm flying at 17,500 feet and it's right in the freezing level, and the old ice just kept building up, building up, building up. We didn't have boots. And so finally I got down to 119 mph with full bore on it and it's starting to stall, so I had to fly in the stall and started it, just kept it airborne, and I lost about 1,500 feet before at 3 degrees per 1,000 feet, lapse rate you know, made it warm up a bit, and now it started washing that ice off, and I flew out of that, and there were 15,000 foot mountains right below us, so I flew out of there, and that's the second time. And another time right about that same place on the hump, we were flying along at 17,500 feet again, and all of a sudden both engines quit. I looked over and I knew what it was instantly. The copilot, whoever it was flying with me at that time, the copilot and I caught the fact that my fuel flows had dropped, dropped, dropped until the engines quit. So I put full carburetor heat to it and we set there and we're losing altitude, losing altitude, and nothing happened. I said OK guys, about time we get out of here. I had a copilot and a radio operator. I said we go back, we get the door open and we're fixin' to bail out of there, and about that time the left engine came back in and roared, and I ran back to the cockpit and straightened the airplane up and got back in the seat, and just as I got back in the seat, the right engine came in. And that was it, that was the end of that emergency.

That's great. Well sir, I've got to wrap things up here because my time here in this conference room is almost up. But again, I want to thank you for letting us interview you today. It's certainly been an honor, and like I mentioned before we started the interview, in a few weeks we're gonna send you copies of this interview on CD's you can give to friends and family, and we'll also include a nice certificate and letter from Commissioner Patterson in a commemorative binder, and it's all just a very small way that the state of Texas is saying thank you to you for your service to our nation.

John Harley Ruth: Well James, I thank you, sir. You know that I have more or less the same thing, it's about two DVD's -

At the Nimitz Museum.

John Harley Ruth: Yeah, Nimitz.

Yes sir. Well we're honored that we were able to record your interview for here for the Land Office of the State of Texas. Again, thank you very much and I'm sure we'll talk again soon.

John Harley Ruth: Thank you, James.

Yes sir, have a good day, take care.

[End of recording]